



Bukharin and Trotsky

## Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder

Lenin's "[Left-Wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder](#)" (compilation attached; download linked below) is a classic book that was written as advice to the proletarian parties in bourgeois-democratic countries.

It is not the same as Lenin's 1918 "['Left-Wing' Childishness and the Petty-Bourgeois Mentality](#)", which was a correction to the "Left Communists" among the Russian revolutionaries themselves. These included Bukharin, the "doctrinairist", who by 1920 had published, with Preobrazhensky, the pedantic "[ABC of Communism](#)". Lenin was meanwhile taking an opposite tack, and opposing "Left Wing Communism" with the classic book we are looking at today, also published in 1920.

Our downloadable selection includes the chapters listed here in bold. All of these chapter-headings are hyperlinked to the Marxists Internet Archive, where you can read the entire book.

## Contents:

1. In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution
2. An Essential Condition of the Bolsheviks' Success
3. The Principal Stages in the History of Bolshevism
4. The Struggle Against Which Enemies Within the Working-Class Movement Helped Bolshevism Develop, Gain Strength, and Become Steeled
5. "Left-Wing" Communism in Germany. the Leaders, the Party, the Class, the Masses
6. Should Revolutionaries Work in Reactionary Trade Unions?
7. Should We Participate in Bourgeois Parliaments?
8. No Compromises?
9. "Left-Wing" Communism in Great Britain
10. Several Conclusions
11. Appendix

In his **Conclusion**, Lenin begins with two very confident paragraphs summing up the work that he had been intimately involved in as a vanguard cadre:

*"The Russian bourgeois revolution of 1905 revealed a highly original turn in world history: in one of the most backward capitalist countries, the strike movement attained a scope and power unprecedented anywhere in the world. In the first month of 1905 alone, the number of strikers was ten times the annual average for the previous decade (1895-1904); from January to October 1905, strikes grew all the time and reached enormous proportions. Under the influence of a number of unique historical conditions, backward Russia was the first to show the world, not only*

the growth, by leaps and bounds, of the independent activity of the oppressed masses in time of revolution (this had occurred in all great revolutions), but also that the significance of the proletariat is infinitely greater than its proportion in the total population; it showed a combination of the economic strike and the political strike, with the latter developing into an armed uprising, and the birth of the Soviets, a new form of mass struggle and mass organisation of the classes oppressed by capitalism.

*“The revolutions of February and October 1917 led to the all-round development of the Soviets on a nation-wide scale and to their victory in the proletarian socialist revolution. In less than two years, the international character of the Soviets, the spread of this form of struggle and organisation to the world working-class movement and the historical mission of the Soviets as the grave-digger, heir and successor of bourgeois parliamentarianism and of bourgeois democracy in general, all became clear.”*

In **Chapter 2**, Lenin stresses the necessity of having a disciplined vanguard part, and says:

*“As a current of political thought and as a political party, Bolshevism has existed since 1903. Only the history of Bolshevism during the entire period of its existence can satisfactorily explain why it has been able to build up and maintain, under most difficult conditions, the iron discipline needed for the victory of the proletariat.”*

In chapters 3 and 4, which are not in our compilation, but which

can be read on the Internet, Lenin covers some of the experiences and the controversies that formed the Bolshevik party on a “*granite foundation of theory*”. We have covered some of this ground in our examination of previous Classics.

In the body of the book, Lenin definitely advises the Communists to work within, and not to boycott, both reactionary trade unions, and Parliaments. Lenin seems to be saying that it is the “granite foundation of theory” that gives the vanguard party the certainty and the confidence that enables it “*with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics,*” or in other words, to be able to manoeuvre. And without the ability to manoeuvre, there can be no thought of victory. All “*doctrinairism*” that inhibits the ability to manoeuvre, is dangerous.

Lenin’s final two paragraphs of the book are as follows:

*“The Communists must exert every effort to direct the working-class movement and social development in general along the straightest and shortest road to the victory of Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world-wide scale. That is an incontestable truth. **But it is enough to take one little step farther**—a step that might seem to be in the same direction—**and truth turns into error**. We have only to say, as the German and British Left Communists do, that we recognise only one road, only the direct road, and that we will not permit tacking, conciliatory manoeuvres, or compromising—and it will be a mistake which may cause, and in part has already caused and is*

*causing, very grave prejudices to communism. Right doctrinairism persisted in recognising only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as Communists to master all forms to learn how, with the maximum rapidity, to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another, and to adapt our tactics to any such change that does not come from our class or from our efforts.*

*“World revolution has been so powerfully stimulated and accelerated by the horrors, vileness and abominations of the world imperialist war and by the hopelessness of the situation created by it, this revolution is developing in scope and depth with such splendid rapidity, with such a wonderful variety of changing forms, with such an instructive practical refutation of all doctrinairism, that there is every reason to hope for a rapid and complete recovery of the international communist movement from the infantile disorder of "Left-wing" communism.”*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder \(Redaction\), 1920, Lenin.](#)
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